

柳実冬貴

対魔導学園

AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"

35 試験小隊

Another Mission 2



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Illustrations

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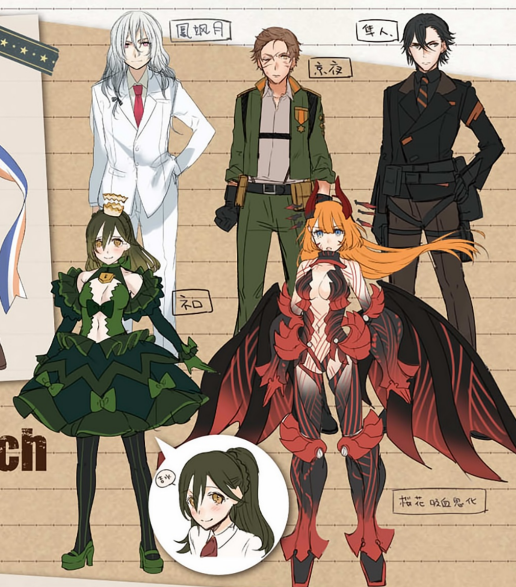
Another Mission 2



ファンタジア文庫



Early Design | 1巻当時の35小隊メンバー初期デザイン



Secret Design Sketch

35 小隊、異端審問会、幻想教団の
キャラクターデザインを蔵出し公開！



8巻での防寒スタイル **Winter Style**



After Mission - Five Years Later - New Years, Last Event

Inquisition-exclusive vehicle sirens robbed the city of sleep. This place, was a construction site of a newly built stadium with imposing atmosphere.

While Seelies have carried the patients on stretchers, Spriggans blocked the entrance to the stadium not letting the onlookers and mass media enter. At the site there were also Regins and Dullahans wearing protective clothing, as well as Selkie magic-sealers who maintained a barrier covering the entire stadium. Fulfilling their respective roles, Inquisitors crowded around the stadium.

Inside the stadium there was no sight of a single person. Instead, there was something that looked like a black mist.

It was magic of "Corruption" property which excelled at changing the environment. Simply put, it was poisonous gas. The poisonous gas was kept within the stadium by the newly-established Selkie troop which was a unit composed of sorcerers and witches. The stadium had about 140 meters in diameter and was sixty meters tall. It was hard to say that six Selkies were enough to continuously maintain a protective barrier of such size.

In a location on top of the protection barrier stood a single man. He had black hair on the longer side, and was wearing a black EXE uniform as he looked at the stadium beneath while using the barrier as a foothold. The stadium was filled with semi-transparent gas that looked like muddy water and it was hard to confirm what happened inside.

However, the man—Kusanagi Takeru strained his eyes and reported the situation inside through the intercom.

"...Found it. Confirmed the magic circle in the middle of the field."

《"Roger. Is there just one?"》

"Yeah. Just a single person. Considering it's a sorcerer, it must be an illegal immigrant from a shelter. If mass media learn of this, the diplomatic efforts are going to grow worse. We have to make sure no information leaks."

《"The fact that target used magic to create poison gas spares us trouble. That's not something you expect of witch-side terrorism... It'll be easy to cover this up."》

"You sure have turned scheming... Ouka."

As Takeru spoke her name with a bitter smile, Ouka has sighed on the other side of the connection.

《"How long do you intend on acting like we're still in test platoon, Kusanagi. During missions call me with my surname, Mineshiro, or there will be misunderstandings."》

"It's fine, isn't it. We're both vice-captains, got the same rank."

He puffed his chest a little proudly.

《"Because of your circumstances you rarely even take command. Did you forget I do almost all vice-captain's work?"》

Takeru immediately relaxed his body and shrugged apologetically.

"...Y-you're right. Umm, you sure a snipe won't be enough?"

《"How is it, Saionji?"》

Hearing Ouka say Usagi's name, Takeru turned his gaze towards the helicopter flying over his head.

He saw golden hair fluttering on the wind on top of the helicopter's boarding hatch.

《"With the barrier up it is not a good idea to snipe. I will not miss, but it's uncertain whether I will finish the target off."》

"...Do NOT finish the target off. How's it look down there, Suginami?"

He held the intercom tightly against his ear.

《"Removal of the leaked-out gas is complete."》

"Sorry for pulling you out to do work outside your jurisdiction."

《"Actually it was great help for me too since I could test my prototype magic decontamination system. Still, if you feel bad about it, pay me with your body."》

《《《"Suginamiii!"》》》

The communications were interrupted and a loud sound hurt his ear. Even after five years, things like these haven't changed. He heard three voices at once, because there was one more person at the scene here.

"N-Nikaido-sensei? I'm glad to have you help out during your time off, but for now could you tell me how's the barrier?"

Takeru asked Mari – who was currently a teacher – for an on-site situation report.

《"——Takeru's virginity is mine!!"》

"HEEYyyy?! This is an open channel! All of EXE's members are listening!!"

Hearing EXE members' laughter and voices of surprise, Takeru blushed and yelled.

《"Mgrr! The barrier will hold for five minutes longer! If it's to take more time, release magic power restriction up to level 4."》

"Shit! Why do I have to have a coming out here about me being a virgin...! Got it! Five minutes' enough, I'll do this!"

Takeru said that as tears pooled in his eyes and placed his hand on the azure sword. Ouka's groan could be heard over the intercom.

《"If it's found out you appeared on the scene... Kurogane-san will be furious. I bet all color will be drained from captain Oonogi's face."》

"You were the one who called me here, Ouka. I still am a vice-captain... let me participate sometimes. At this rate my body will grow dull and I won't be able to show myself to subordinates if I don't work."

《"Think more of the position you're in... Whenever you're put into action, the higher-ups always complain and find faults with us. Your supervision is also part of my job, understand that."》

Ouka said that along with a sigh, making Takeru apologize with a wry smile.

"But well, I'm suitable for the work this time, aren't I? I'll end this in a flash, y'know? And it'll be cheaper than pulling out Dragoons."

《".....Yeah, I know. I know that much, but..."》

"It's all right. I definitely won't die. That's my job."

Takeru pulled out his sword and slashed the barrier as if drawing a circle.

The protective barrier was cut apart by the blade and Takeru lost his footing. For just a moment he felt he was floating before he felt in his back that he was falling down towards the inside of the stadium.

"Finally real combat after so long!"

《"H-hey! Make sure not to kill the target, okay?!"》

"It's all riiight! I'll hit him with the back of the sword!"

《"Wait, with your swordsmanship that won't change any——"》

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——"

Holding his sword poised he rotated his body. At the same time the blade was tinged with azure-colored flame and it began to absorb the poisonous gas all at once. With the stadium interior instantly purified, Takeru saw a man in the middle of the magic circle raise his face.

Rotating and applying his entire body weight,

"Mantis Slope!"

Takeru smashed the sword onto his target.

——Five years have passed since the Second Witch-Hunt War. Hyakki Yakou spreading over the capital had suddenly turned into ash and the war met its end without a winner. Even after Inquisition was reconstructed, peace agreement with witches' country signed, and diplomatic relations established, it was hard to say they could finally relax.

Every time they solved a problem, new ones appeared one after another. Humans had no choice but to walk towards a new era.

Takeru, Ouka and the other members of ex-35th platoon kept fighting even now, in their new positions.

* * *

10 p.m. in the evening after the incident was solved. EXE's members have gathered in a private room of a pub that was part of a famous chain of pubs.

"*ngulp**gulp**ngulp*... phew! Seriously? He was most shuitable for dealing with thaatt〜? That's why Kusanagi headed out?"

BAM, a beer mug was smashed onto the table. With an unsteady tone of voice, EXE's current captain Oonogi Kanata questioned them why was Takeru on the scene. It was Friday night, only members who had time off on Saturday were participating in the drinking party. Originally, only Ouka and Usagi participated in action as members of EXE, but Ikaruga and Mari had also came to help at Ouka's request. Since they were already together, the two were asked to participate in the reflection meeting as well.

Not even touching the liquor, Takeru made a bitter smile as he sat in seiza.

"Th-that'd be about it... ah, but, um..."

"Don't "but" and "um" me, I've had enough of that! You need to think more of your position, Kusanagi!"

"I'm properly reflecting on that, but... but you were dealing with another incident, captain Oonogi and so was the majority of Dragoons, right? Extermination Riot Police are mainly battle-oriented, so there was no choice but for me to appear〜."

"If you asked Spriggan you'd get protective clothing against miasma! Everything would work out if everyone charged in wearing that, right? Why'd you call Kusanagi of all things, Ouka-chan!"

Hearing those words Takeru felt slightly hurt. Once again Kanata smashed the mug onto the table and this time she glared at Ouka. Her shoulders twitched, and interrupting her chat with other ex-35th platoon members she sat in seiza beside Takeru.

"N-no, that's, well..."

"No "that's" no "well"!"

"I'm sorry... it's just that the enemy wasn't compatible with Vlad and an A-rank dangerous designation was too high to allow Spriggans and Dullahans to enter as there was a possibility of casualties. As for suppression with Dragoons, now that Alchemist is no more, the repair costs upon receiving damage are..."

"Still, you could at least report a single word about it to me! C'mon! Do you know who's the one who has to listen to vice-chairman Kurogane's complaints? It's me! MEEE!"

""I'm sorry..."

Takeru and Ouka bowed lightly to completely drunk Kanata. As she rampaged in drunken rage, she was appeased by other of her colleagues. Knowing how much hardships she went through after being given the position of EXE's captain, Takeru and Ouka couldn't refute too strongly.

Despite officially being the vice-captain, Takeru hardly ever participated in actual combat because of the problems related with his little sister Kiseki, and only took command in very specific situations. On the other hand, Ouka very often took command of entire EXE while Kanata was absent.

Ouka poked Takeru's side with her elbow.

"I told you so, didn't I... though, I was the one to call you."

"Sorry... really, really sorry for that."

With a sigh, the two picked up some salted cabbage pieces and started munching on them.

"Today was really chaotic, wasn't it, captain Oonogi..."

Usagi sitting in front of them smiled wryly and scratched her cheek.

"You too, Usagi, sorry about today. I called you out even though you're a member of the reserve..."

"It is fine. Today was the day I had to come back home, so it was helpful instead."

She snorted loudly and crossed her arms.

"Eh... I did hear that there was some development in relations after the talk with your stepmother turned into a fist fight... you reconciled after that, didn't you?"

"Reconcileddddd? You must be joking. That hag has no intention of getting along with me. Of course, neither have I."

"Hag...? Your mouth sure has turned foul. Must be hard on your father."

"That person too is a problem. "Work is all fine, but when will you marry someone~? When will I have a grandchild~?" he asks casually, but it is obvious that these are pretty much demands."

"Hahaha..."

Similarly, Takeru too was invited by Saionji house's head for a dinner party so he couldn't say anything to defend Usagi's father. It meant that her father wanted to call dibs on Takeru so that he isn't taken by other members. Although, it felt very strange to see her parents go out of their way to try and claim him.

Usagi poured beer into Takeru's mug and milk inside Ouka's cup.

"Who cares about that. Cheers for your good work today. I repeat myself every time, but I can tell just how hard it is on you two~."

"Thanks, you always bring us comfort, Usagi..."

"Wait, Saionji. I might have it hard, but this guy here is far from having any hardships."

While Usagi poured for them, Ouka squinted and spoke sarcastically. Takeru clearly received shock from that as he received the mug.

"I-I'm taking care of your letters of apology, aren't I?! I have a hard time doing desk work I'm not good at!"

"Yes yes."

"Ouka-san, aren't you cold towards me lately?!"

"If you think so, then how about you shoulder half of my stress?"

SHOCK.

"E-even if I want to, my position doesn't allow me too～... I-I want to work too... I can only watch as my comrades are sorting out for action... it's hard on me mentally..."

"H-hey, don't cry! It was just a joke, I'm completely responsible for the case this time!"

Ouka pat Takeru's back as he curled up. Seeing the two like that, Mari started laughing loudly.

"Ah ha ha ha! It's strange to see Takeru made cry by Ouka's jokes～. EXE has it tough, cheers for good work there～."

Sitting next to Usagi, Mari exchanged cheers with Ikaruga and started jeering loudly.

"So EXE is having drinking parties too huh. Moreover, at a popular pub in front of the station too... I wonder where has the talk of high salary gone to. I guess that with the new system Inquisitors had their salary reduced～, and you can't spend as much either."

Supporting her head on her hand, Ikaruga tilted the glass with wine and smiled bitterly. Seeing her with alcohol in hand, Takeru reacted with a "geh".

"Suginami, don't drink too much, okay? You vomit right away..."

As Takeru tried to take away the bottle with wine, Ikaruga hugged it against herself to protect it.

"I'm tired because of having to take care of your little sister, let me drink a little."

"D-do you have to mention that? It's something only you can do, Suginami, please understand."

"I do understaaand, but I'm not married to you yet I have to take care of your family, so how about you show some gratitude?"

Ikaruga scooped up her hair and turned a sidelong glance towards him, so Takeru immediately stood up and poured wine into her glass.

"I am in your debt as always. I'm sorry for giving you trouble today."

"I have stiff shoulders～ mm～."

"P-please allow me to rub them."

Even though he was a little annoyed, Takeru rubbed Ikaruga's shoulders.

"Ahh, there, right there... ahn... ahhn... nn."

"Stop letting out strange sounds."

"A virgin like you should play along better."

"It's because I'm a virgin that I can't play along well... also, stop repeating "virgin" in front of people, you no better yourself."

"Will you have mine?"

"What's with that troubling reply...?!"

Beside Takeru who rubbed Ikaruga's shoulders with a grimace on his face, Mari pointed at herself with an excited expression.



"Takeruu, what about me? Will you rub mine? Won't you?"

Seeing Mari appeal she wants her shoulders rubbed, Ikaruga snorted with a blissful expression on her face.

"You aren't big enough to have anything to rub."

"Not boobs! I meant shoulders!"

"But yours don't grow stiff, right? You've got so much time you keep coming to my place to play."

"How rude! Being a teacher is hard, too!"

Mari swung her fists, clenched with frustration. Usagi who was splitting salad onto small dishes looked towards her.

"I am surprised you have so much free time despite being both a teacher and Selkie's instructor at the same time."

"Like I said, I don't have so much free time..."

"Yeah, you're just lonely."

"T-t-that's not it... heck, you guys sometimes come to play over, too!"

Having that pointed out by Mari, Ouka and Usagi twitched then stiffened up.

Now that she says it, that's true. Takeru thought as he massaged Ikaruga's shoulders. Whenever the members of the ex-35th platoon had time off, they always came to Ikaruga's workplace, Hyakki Yakou's control room to play. Since they kept coming under various pretenses, things like teasesets, sofas and private lockers kept appearing in the control room. Most likely they spent more time in there, rather than in their own rooms.

Usagi smiled wryly and held a cup with ginger ale in her both hands.

"In the end, no one here has changed. I am still a reserve member of EXE, but I visit that place during free time between training sessions."

"Me too... I even end up using that place to do my desk work."

Ouka agreed with Usagi and put some salad inside her mouth.

"Although it is my workplace, it's more like my home. But certainly, it has

turned comfortable lately. At first it was dim and creepy, but you all brought lots of stuff and changed lighting inside."

"Like, that place's atmosphere started to feel like that of the platoon's room, didn't it? Although it's much more spacious, it's turned very snugly and kind of "at home" lately..."

Recalling 35th platoon's room, all of them nodded.

It seemed unbelievable now, but in the past these members fought in order to return to that place. They gave up themselves in order to save the world and the place they belonged to.

The war ended five years ago and they graduated from the school three years ago after which they let go of the platoon room, deciding walk their respective paths. At first they felt reluctant, as if they lost a place to return to. However, recently Takeru understood it wasn't the location that was important. The place his comrades gathered, was the platoon room, it mattered not where was it located.

Takeru finished rubbing Ikaruga's shoulders, returned to his seat and happily drank a mouthful of beer.

"Well, ain't that fine? It's not like anyone will criticize us about it, might as well make it our platoon's room."

"I don't think turning the control room completely private is a good idea. In fact, that place is Inquisition's most important secret."

"That's true, but it's also important for Kiseki to feel comfortable, y'know? She always says she's happy whenever you all come."

When Takeru said so, Ouka opened her eyes a little surprised.

"D-does that include me?"

"Your name often comes up when we talk."

"...You're lying. I bet you're just being mindful of me. I'm, well... hated by Kiseki."

"No, I'm serious. She says that she's too nervous and doesn't know what to talk about with you. There is no way she would hate the person who stopped

her."

"?! ...B-but you can't be sure... mfpmh, mmmfmph."

Ouka started munching on the salad in order to hide her agitation.

What Takeru said was the truth. Kiseki has (literally) established an emotional bond with the 35th platoon's members and for the first time in her life, she accepted someone other than her brother. Thanks to them, her field of view expanded and she started to walk a path other than that of destruction.

The decisive point were Ouka's honest feelings. By sympathizing with her feelings, Kiseki ceased to wish for destruction. Kiseki was grateful for that. Them being able to be together now, was thanks to 35th platoon's members and Ouka.

"Kiseki-san has become very cheerful. Recently she has grown an interest in fashion and asks me to buy things for her."

Hearing Usagi say that, Ikaruga shrugged.

"Rather than cheerful, she's just become honest. She exercises her selfishness she had hidden until now, not to have any regrets. Although I was the one who told her to speak honestly and not hide any emotions, she still shocks me from time to time."

"W-well, certainly she does sometime say "No♪" with a wonderful smile. But Suginami, you like Kiseki-chan as she is now, right? I prefer her as she is now, too～."

"I don't like her. I just no longer hate her."

"Oh you, acting all embarrassed again— —fghuoh!"

Ikaruga who was leaning on her hand, pinched Mari's nose and pulled.

"I'm not embarrassed, it's a fact. There is no way that girl likes me either. Rather, she still doesn't understand well what it means to like other people. However, there is no doubt that Kusanagi aside, the one she opened her heart to the most is Usagi. It looks like you two spend a lot of time together, was there some change?"

Usagi who carried karaage into her mouth and munched, had tilted her head in wonder.

"Mmm, like I said earlier, she's very interested in clothing... and although I am not as good at it as Suginami is, we have fun together as I match clothes for her."

"No wonder she recently started wearing clothes other than the uniform she has for camouflage."

"However, considering she is interested in clothes to wear, thinking deeper into it..."

Putting a finger against her mouth, Usagi furrowed her eyebrows.

"I cannot help thinking that... she might be wanting to go outside."

"Isn't it something like, she wants her beloved onii-chan to see her as cute?"

Mari asked, making Usagi ponder about it with a "hmm".

"It does not feel like she wants to be seen cute but... The clothes she wants really vary. Jerseys for hill climbing, formal wear, ski wear, even mourning dresses."

Just as Usagi said, rather than things that would make her cute, they were clothes for going outside with a certain purpose in mind.

"...Takeru, don't you think Kiseki wants to go outside?"

Questioned by Ouka, Takeru squinted and slowly drank his beer.

"That might be so, but we've already troubled everyone more than we can ever repay for... We can't be any more selfish."

"...But, what about your goal?"

"Let her live a normal life... certainly, it's still far from normal, but she looks plenty happy already. I too, am happy now."

"....."

"I think any more than this, would be a luxury."

The moment Takeru said so, Kanata turned her arm around his neck and started releasing the stress she has gathered because of complaints she had to listen to. The place turned noisy, Mari and Ikaruga laughed loudly.

"....."

Meanwhile, Ouka put a hand against her chin as if thinking about something.

* * *

Heading home, the 35th platoon's members sent off Kanata in a taxi then headed back to their lodgings.

Takeru was in the middle of returning to his home at the moment. Although reluctantly, he moved out of that beat-up apartment and was now living in a basement room of Hyakki Yakou building's.

Descending on the elevator, Takeru opened up his mobile phone.

He had three mails. One, was from Hoshijiro Nagaru. She was supposed to be in the middle of talks at the shelter in the New York state.

In the mail, there was a single image and a single phrase comment.

On the image there was a building that imitated the Statue of Liberty and Nagaru who was wearing a white dress and a thick makeup. She was rolling up her skirt and making a "rawr"-kind of expression.

The comment was "Marilyn☆White".

"Don't use tax money to play around... Sent."

After he typed in a reply, he immediately opened the next mail.

The next mail was from Kurogane Hayato. Currently he was in charge of Inquisition's vice-chairman's position and had full command in chairman's absence. Since he was busy and rarely found in the capital, they didn't meet too often, but...

『"I've heard from Oonogi. Good job today, rest well."』

Very unexpectedly, the content of the mail were words of appreciation.

『"P.S. Come to headquarters tomorrow. Wait in chairman's room before I arrive. Prepare yourself. That's all."』

Is what he thought, but he ended up with a stomachache anyway. Takeru placed a hand on the elevator's wall with resolve, then opened the next mail.

The last one was from the former captain of "Pureblood Party's" seventh

squad, Sage Wallenstein.

"Oh... It's been a while..."

He hasn't met Sage for two years. Currently, Sage was flying around the world as European shelter West Side's diplomat. After that battle, Sage returned to the shelter before anyone else and reported the current war situation in old Japan. Not only he convinced both East and West sides, but also worked hard towards an armistice. It was said that the fact peace negotiations with Inquisition has gone smooth, was largely thanks to him.

Even longer than Sage, he hasn't met Yuzuho. Together with the sixth miko, Yuzuho has become independent of "Gods' Embers" and they started a completely new religious activity... or rather, they started acting as charity. Since there were plenty of shelters at civil war, they went to such places and supported people in there. They haven't come in contact with Takeru, but since they sent him a charm every year, they surely were doing all right.

The content of the mail was as follows.

『"It turned out that I will be coming to old Japan in three days. There is something I want to talk with you about at that time. It is something you will find beneficial. Please find time. Regards."』

Sage kept things concise as usual. That guy never says any more than he needs to, Takeru thought with a wry smile.

However, it felt strange that Sage who did pay attention to courtesy, had only conveyed him what he wanted to and did not mention a greeting. There must have been a good reason for that.

Takeru finished replying and after folding his mobile phone he put it away in the pocket.

At the same time, the elevator reached the lowest level. It shook strongly as soon as it arrived. Takeru inserted the PIN on the wall and finished retina authentication, when he did, he could hear multiple gates open below the elevator.

The fact it was this strict, was natural. Although Kiseki's situation had improved, Hyakki Yakou still remained inside her. There was no change to the

fact it was unpredictable.

However, there was no need to make it as rigid as it used to be. Or rather, making it so would bring opposite effect both to Kiseki and the world. Both Takeru and Kiseki agreed on this level of strictness.

When he reached the bottom layer, the door opened automatically.

A fluorescent light stung his eyes, making him squint.

"I'm baack〜... oh, you're still up?"

After he left the elevator, he immediately entered what looked like an apartment. For some reason, at the bottom of Inquisition's most important and top secret facility there was a 2LDK apartment. Drawers for clothing and closets, small kitchen, a TV and sofa. There was a sliding room leading to bedroom and on the table... sitting and puffing up her cheeks, was Kiseki.

"....."

"...What is it? You're making a face like a squirrel preparing for hibernation."

Wondering whether was she dissatisfied with something Takeru smiled wryly and took off his shoes. Kiseki turned her gaze towards him and loudly released air from her mouth.

After entering the room, Takeru noticed that there was a meal prepared on the table.

"Eh? I sent a mail haven't I, that today we're having a drinking party."

".....It didn't come. No mail came."

Takeru hurriedly checked on the mail. Apparently the reception was bad when he sent it and he didn't realize the mail had come back unsent.

This was clearly the "I made dinner and waited for you to come home" situation.

"Sorry!! It looks like it wasn't sent because reception was bad..."

When Takeru apologized, Kiseki once again puffed up her cheeks and supported her chin with her both hands.

"And here I tried making a chicken stew Usagi-san taught me... it came out

well, tooooo."

"I-I'll eat. Today I've been talking all evening and didn't eat much. Ohh, looks sooo tasty."

He quickly washed his hand, stood next to the chair belonging to his dear sword, took off the uniform's jacket and sat down. It seemed like Kiseki had waited for him without eating herself, and was quite hungry. When Takeru peeked at her to check on her expression, Kiseki suddenly exhaled and started laughing.

"I'm sorry, it was just a prank. I felt like acting a little mean because Onii-chan was late. Ikaruga-oneesama has called me and explained."

"W-what... then, this dinner is...?"

"It's a stew, we can eat it tomorrow as well so I made plenty. Are you really hungry, Onii-chan? If you're eating, I'll warm it up."

Kiseki stood up in response to Takeru's nod and brought the pot on a stove.

"What would you like to drink? Beer?"

"Nahh, I've drank plenty already so I'll pass on alcohol. I'd like some tea."

"Onii-chan's a big drinker, after all. Kiseki turns red just by drinking a little."

"Not being able to get drunk is boring. Suginami went too far today as well and everyone else also got drunk."

Kiseki laughed while pouring hot tea into a teacup.

"Everyone's weak to alcohol, aren't they～."

"Because I'm the only one sober when we head out home, cleaning up after everything is also up to me. Honestly, I sweat more than during the mission."

"Ah, a bath first was a better idea?"

She said and suddenly gasped.

Standing in front of the refrigerator she put her hands on her cheeks and shook her head with a beet red face.

"I-it sounded like... we're a married c-couple."

"Haha, which time is it now."

"T-that's because... Kiseki always yearned for this kind of thing."

Squirming embarrassed she put the stew and tea on a tray, then cheerfully approached the table. Although five years have passed since that battle, Kiseki's appearance did not change. Her body was not growing.

Even though she was twenty-one this year, her body remained same as back when she was fifteen. This too, was a proof that Hyakki Yakou was still dwelling inside Kiseki.

"....."

Takeru looked at his dear sword.

Mistilteinn... Lapis abandoned the path to become God together with Takeru and reached Godhood alone, maintaining the world as is.

Although Takeru's destroyed body was restored, the demon curse on Kiseki was not released. He didn't know what did this mean, but it would be a lie to say that he didn't hold expectations about that.

However, maintaining the current state of things was the end Takeru wished for. Just like he told Ouka, wishing for any more would be a luxury. He was able to carry through with his selfishness of wanting to keep Kiseki alive, he had to pay for what he has received with his own hands. It would be wrong for him to let himself be spoiled by his partner.

Pulling himself together, he put his hands together.

"All right, let's eat."

"Eat up～."

He picked up stewed chicken with his chopsticks and carried it to his mouth. The flavor has permeated well and it was very tasty. As expected of cooking learned from Usagi one would say, or possibly Kiseki had a talent for cooking in the first place, but food Kiseki made was very elegant and delicious.

While making the meal lively with a chat, the two enjoyed the food.

Cooking aside, Kiseki was also interested in sewing and recently she even

starting painting, but Takeru was unable to understand her original works. Moreover, because she spent a lot of time with Ikaruga, she seemed to have been studying sciences and biology as well. Ikaruga said that lately Kiseki has become capable of helping her out in development of anti-magic equipment and weaponry.

Ikaruga said "Unlike you, that girl is a lump of talents", apparently. Were she a normal human, she might have distinguished herself in some kind of field.

If only Kiseki was the same as a normal human...

"What is it? Onii-chan."

Interrupting the casual chat, Kiseki worriedly spoke to Takeru who lost himself in thoughts. He tried to immediately fix his expression, but she stared at his face intently.

"Hey, Kiseki."

"Nn?"

Kiseki tilted her head puzzled, munching on taro meanwhile.

"Are you happy now?"

That was something he had yet to ask until now. Although he was worried, it wasn't like he was afraid of asking. Takeru knew well that the current and previous situations were like heaven and earth.

However, there was no doubt it was different from the "normal" Takeru wished for.

Kiseki smiled broadly without any hesitation.

"Yup, Kiseki is very happy."

Takeru knew best of all that there was no lie in her smile.

He smiled bashfully and responded with just "I see".

After that, they took a bath and laid down in the bedroom.

The two slept in the same bed. Ever since they started living here, they always slept this way. Kiseki was unable to sleep unless Takeru held her hand.

Kiseki was seeing nightmares every single night. What she recalled in her dreams was not memories of how she was killed, but memories of those she killed. Every night she was shown the scene where people she did not know were being swallowed by Hyakki Yakou. Those memories weren't an illusion made of a dream, but *what Hyakki Yakou actually saw*.

Either Hyakki Yakou inside her has shown it to her, or maybe it was the grudge of those she killed. The reason was unknown, but sins kept chasing after Kiseki.

"...I'm sor...rry...I'm sorry.....I'm...sorry..."

Even in her sleep, Kiseki continued to apologize as she cried. Takeru wanted to do something about it, but Kiseki did not wish for these nightmares to stop.

『"Because Kiseki can't do anything for the people she killed."』

Living while carrying those sins, was what she desired.

Takeru had no choice but to agree on it. What he could do now, was only hold her hand like this so that she doesn't cry when she wakes up in the morning.

...Was that really all he could do?

He hugged Kiseki's body and gently pat her head. What he wished for... was it really wrong for him to wish to give her more happiness, like that of normal people?

Lapis told Takeru this:

Please become happy.

".....Not there yet, right... Lapis..."

Takeru who resigned himself to the current situation, had once again determined himself to fight.

Early morning a day later. At six in the morning, Takeru rushed to vice-chairman's office immediately after waking up.

When he opened the door, for some reason Kurogane Hayato and Ouka were already there.

"Good morning! I'm sorry to be late!"

Although he came at this time while certain he would come before Hayato, he was beat to the punch. While in move, prepared for severe scolding and immediately moved in front of the desk.

Hayato crossed his arms as he sat in the chair and glared at Takeru with his usual expression.

He looked fierce as ever. There was no change in his appearance. Rather than not seeming too old, it was like he brushed age aside.

While Hayato held the position of vice-chairman, he was in command of *secret part of EXE*. EXE had officially consisted only of the Zeroth Annihilation Riot Police, but after the Inquisition's structure changed, a secret second unit was created.

Now there was surface part of EXE that Oonogi Kanata was in command of, as well as the secret part that Kurogane Hayato controlled.

The secret unit's captain was Hayato, it consisted of the former vice-captain Magnolia Scarlet, *Hoshijiro* Kagerou, and werewolf Gou. Their job was escorting the current chairman Hoshijiro Nagaru and taking action that goes beyond those permissible by law – in other words, doing *the least pretty work there is*.

Takeru didn't know what was the reason why the three who were under Ootori Sougetsu's command have followed Hayato, but he heard that Nagaru had persuaded them. Although, he couldn't even imagine how did she do that. The thing he understood the least, was why Kagerou took on Hoshijiro surname, or rather, he didn't even want to know.

Standing in front of Hayato, Takeru resolved himself and corrected his posture.

"...Please let me officially explain and apologize for yesterday's incident!"

"No need. Rather than that, how has your little sister been recently?"

Huh? Takeru thought in shock. He was sure that he has been called about yesterday's incident. It was also a mystery why was Ouka standing on the side.

"Kiseki? There isn't much change so far..."

"I'm hearing that her interest in going outside is growing. Is that true?"

Takeru looked at Ouka. Though he didn't really think that she did a bad thing

by informing him. Ouka also didn't seem to mean bad, as she looked at Takeru with a serious expression and nodded once.

"...Yes. I think there is no doubt about it, but..."

"Do you know what is the reason for that?"

"I think... there is no reason. I believe that by living in that place, it is normal to long for outside... However, it is not like Kiseki is dissatisfied with her current situation. I can assure you of that."

Hearing Takeru's words, Hayato deeply leaned his back on the chair and squinted even more sharply.

"——You haven't made a child, have you?"

.....

"Huh? ——N-no. What do you mean by that?"

Astounded for a moment, Takeru asked again. Ouka on the side also made a strange expression.

"Vice-chairman Kurogane... I have earlier assured you that there is no need to worry about that."

"In order to prevent Kusanagi Kiseki from accumulating stress we have not installed cameras in that room and *your relationship as siblings is still shallow*. As long as you are a man and a woman, it cannot be ruled out. You haven't made a mistake, have you?"

...While that concern was reasonable, the question was incredibly uncouth. But since it was Hayato saying it, it didn't sound like harassment and possibility of Takeru making a child with Kiseki was a big problem.

That wasn't a restriction limited to Kiseki either. Takeru too, *was not allowed to leave offspring*. The curse on Kusanagi was inherited to their descendants. Of course, if Takeru makes children, they too will inherit the demon curse. It can be somehow managed through education in case of males, but in case of females they would end up the same as Kiseki. Possibly an even stronger Hyakki Yakou might be born. And in case of a child born between siblings, Kiseki and Takeru, it was unknown what would be born.

It wasn't a laughing matter. Takeru stiffened his loose expression.

"It's all right. I'm a virgin."

Takeru said that sharply, dignified, clear and proudly. Hearing that Hayato opened his eyes wide astonished, then quietly closed them.

".....Sorry."

"Please don't apologize... it makes me feel really pathetic."

"When we learn how to release the demon curse we will not have to worry. You will be allowed to do the act itself and it will be possible for you to make children."

"No, I can't make kids with my little sister anyway, can I."

"I don't care. Do as you please."

""No, that's not okay, is it?!""

Takeru's voice overlapped with Ouka's. Hayato was a serious and stiff man, but sometimes he said ridiculous things. The two were often at mercy of his bizarre remarks. He had no ill intent, but was quite a strange person.

"We are currently investigating the demon curse in cooperation with a coalition of multiple shelters. We are taking this problem as top priority. It is too dangerous to remain in the current situation... If we learn anything, we will tell you right away."

Saying so, Hayato looked away from Takeru and opened the desk's drawer

It was true that Hayato was acting towards dealing with the demon curse. The reason Kiseki was allowed to live as she is now, was thanks to the fact Hayato has *threatened* the current higher-ups.

The reason Takeru wasn't allowed to participate in missions, was because his life was a card used to shut up the higher-ups. If Kiseki harmed humans with Hyakki Yakou, the collar on Takeru's neck would explode, killing him.

Because her brother's death was what Kiseki hated the most, they remained certain that "Kiseki will not deliberately use Hyakki Yakou to hurt other people". Of course, naturally the higher ups weren't convinced with that. Hayato and

Nagaru had pretty much threatened them by saying that this was the only way to stop Hyakki Yakou from destroying the world.

Were Takeru to die due to another factor, the whole plan would come to nothing. With Kiseki as she was now, even if Takeru died she probably wouldn't go out of control because of their comrades, but the higher-ups would have an excuse to isolate Kiseki and possibly repeat the treatment Ootori Sougetsu had done to her. That was the reason why Hayato and others had a problem with sending Takeru into battle.

There was also a proposal to isolate Takeru and Kiseki together, he intended to accept it but Kiseki had refused. In current state, Inquisition did its best in order to avoid doing things Kiseki is against.

Hayato took out a blank sheet from the drawer, held a pen and looked at Takeru again.

"Back to the main subject. If Kusanagi Kiseki thinks of "wanting to go outside", this makes the situation serious. If she gathers stress because of being unable to go outside, Hyakki Yakou might forcibly force her wish come true."

"I... don't think that will happen. I do not think she will wish for anything that will disrupt the current state of things."

"We can't exclude that possibility in hundred percent. Just earlier, Mineshiro Ouka made a proposal. The reconstruction of the Capital's center is nearly complete... therefore, I will adopt her plan."

A proposal? While Takeru wondered dubiously, Hayato turned around the pen in his fingers and squinted sharply.

"We will have you all go outside on a date together with Kusanagi Kiseki in order to satisfy her desire. You have no right to refuse."

.....

"On... a date?"

"Yeah———a date."

Being told that with such a threatening tone was...

Flabbergasted, Takeru was unable to find strength in his limp-turned body. To

put it simply, Kiseki was officially permitted to go outside.

However, both Takeru and Ouka had yet to know what kind of treatment will Kiseki receive from Inquisition upon going outside.

* * *

《"Banshee Unit Six here——all members are in positions. We commence shadowing the target."》

《"Eight Spriggan Mobile Corp here——all facilities in the area have been secured. Upon seeing any suspicious individuals immediately report and restrain them."》

《"Seelie Biological Control Division here——we are proceeding with monitoring the vitals of the target. Upon reporting, in case there is a need of coma drug injection, please issue an order."》

《"Regin Maintenance Team here——the control of all facilities present in area is under our supervision. In case anything happens, we can turn off power in any compartment at any time."》

"...Understood. Please commence with the mission then. All troops, make sure you aren't noticed by the target."

《《《《"Roger that!"》》》》

Listening to the tension-filled report of the Hyakki Yakou's monitor division, Ouka sighed.

The place she was in, was a radio control tower which imitated Tokyo Tower.

"...I-is it really necessary to make it so exaggerated?"

She asked Hayato, who was sitting in the chair at the center of the control room with his arms crossed.

"Of course. We cannot permit Kusanagi Kiseki to go outside without preparing for any unforeseen circumstances."

"...Chairman Hoshijiro said "okaay☆"."

"It is up to Chairman to decide, but crisis management is my job."

Still, Ouka felt like this amount of forces was an overkill to supervise a mere date, but considering they did not clear the location out of people it might have been necessary to do this.

Even with all the signs reminding people of the Second Witch-Hunt War, left-wing groups' activities and posters being removed, having the word "demon" replaced everywhere, it was impossible to completely prevent people from talking about it.

"It's about time. You hurry to the scene as well."

"...Understood. Um."

Ouka looked at her own appearance and at Hayato's face.

"You can't go out in EXE's uniform, can you. Go change."

"Right."

"Did you bring clothes?"

"Of course."

Seeing her take out a formal suit for women from a bag, Hayato sighed deeply.

"...Suginami has prepared clothes for you. Wear that, dumbass."

"W-wear clothes picked by Suginami?"

"Still better than a suit! Hurry up and go!"

Ordered powerfully by Hayato, Ouka headed towards the changing room as if to escape.

Making a displeased expression she took off her clothes and passed her arms through the sleeves of clothes prepared by Ikaruga.

She was the one who suggested this, but she didn't think it would turn into something this big. Although Ouka thought there would be appropriate amount of monitoring and was ready that their actions would be bound, but she never expected all elite corps to be sortied in order to monitor Hyakki Yakou...

They were going to do this every month...? Just how much tax money will this take?

"No, that's just how dangerous and important mission this is. I should have resolved myself before suggesting this...!"

Ouka slapped her cheeks with both hands and looked in the mirror.

...Seeing her own ridiculous appearance she froze on spot. Why didn't she notice before wearing it?

* * *

Seeing Ouka who arrived at the fountain square they designated as meeting place, former 35th platoon's members and Kiseki all endured laughter.

One of them, burst into laughter loudly.

"Ahahahahahahaha! That's sooo frilly! A tall woman in her twenties is wearing a pink-colored ribbon on top of her head, hah! You're wearing fairy tale-ish clothes, yet you yourself look like someone from a V-kei band——"

"HNNPH!"

"——Kyainn!"

Having Ouka's roundhouse kick burst into her butt, Mari whined like a puppy. Takeru and Usagi were also desperately enduring laughter. It wasn't like it didn't suit her, they thought it was cute. But it didn't match Ouka as she was big in places and tall to boot, so it was more of a NOPE.

"I thought ridicu-moe would be a thing."

"Suginami...! I have no intention of complaining about your sense of fashion, it's one thing were I still fifteen, but this appearance doesn't work for a twenty-one year old!"

"Then why did you wear it?"

"Ugh, vice-chairman Kurogane said I can't go in a suit... I-I don't have of a habit buying casual clothes..."

"Habit? You... that remark is the end of you as a woman. Back during the student days you spent the time wearing just school uniform and after becoming an Inquisitor, you continued to live in that style, right?"

"Uhhh..."

Having that pointed out, Ouka drooped her shoulders depressed and shed tears over her own ridiculous appearance.

"The only one allowed to look like this at our age... is probably Saionji."

"Are you trying to praise me...? Or are you making fun of me...?"

"Unnh! It's not like I didn't look up to girls who look good in these kinds of clothes before!"

"It's better not to say "girls" at women in her twenties... I can't say it suits you, but it's not so ridiculous."

"Uuoonhhh... that desperate follow-up stabs at my heart."

Seeing Ouka on the verge of jumping into a fountain out of embarrassment, Takeru put a hand on her shoulder.

"It's okay (pfft) Ouka, I think it (pfthaha) looks good (hah) on you (pfff)."

"Either laugh or cheer me up!"

"Yeah, sorry. It doesn't suit you."

"I know that much without you telling me! Don't repeat it!"

Teased by everyone, Ouka sobbed.

But then,

"U-umm— —I-I think it looks cute!"

Suddenly Kiseki raised her voice. Everyone turned around towards her in shock. The passerbys too, had their attention caught wondering what happened.

Kiseki lowered the cap she had on her head in panic, hiding her blushing face.

"Ah, um... I-I'm sorry for... suddenly speaking so... loudly... b-but..."

Although she did her best to raise her head, she ended up facing downwards.

Her appearance was the same as five years ago, when she ran away from the deepest prison and had a short date together with Takeru. She was wearing a loose sweatshirt and short jeans. She looked just like she used to back then, making it seem like an illusion of the tragedy from back then returning.

"But, um... Kiseki... think it's cute."

Disturbed by the sudden shower of praises, Ouka panicked completely. Then, she forcibly fixed her expression and smiled.

"No... I don't think I am."

"K-Kiseki isn't lying. I stopped hiding my feelings... so this is the truth."

"....."

"Ouka-san is... cute."

"T... ngh. T-t-tha-thank you."

The two faced downwards blushing and fell silent. A slight distance away, the rest had watched over the two. Their honest impression was "what's with this atmosphere?". The four of them gathered in a circle and started whispering.

"Speaking of which, isn't this the first time Kiseki-chan spoke to Ouka ever since the war?"

"What is up with that atmosphere... it's embarrassing. The space around them turned pink."

"This isn't a bad coupling. How about today we just let those two have a date alone together?"

"Suginami, I understand where you're coming from, but how about prioritize onii-chan for today? Let onii-chan go first?"

"H-hey, you guys! No whisperingggg!"

Noticing how they secretly speak in a circle, Ouka was unable to tolerate the atmosphere and quickly approached them. Mari teased Ouka and the place turned loud. Kiseki stood in front of the fountain watching them, then laughing quietly she approached the four.

"....."

Watching all five, Takeru smiled.

He's always wanted to see this scene. This is what he fought for. Smiling, Kiseki and his comrades blended into the normal daily life's scenery.

"...Yet another happiness has come true, Lapis."

* * *

The first outing went smoothly. Everyone went to the game center, did bowling, karaoke, were in a bookstore, movie theater, clothing store... they spent the entire day going to places students would go to have fun in.

Kiseki was nervous only at the beginning, after she got used she started requesting to see various things. They did everything they could not back when Takeru was spending time with Kiseki under pretense of escorting Kiseki to the deepest prison.

They were things Kiseki wanted to do, and they all spent the day together. She frolicked around like a normal girl.

She was a girl who could accomplish everything without a problem. She had high scores in games, got a score of 270 in bowling, finished reading three archeology books in just thirty minutes when they stopped by the bookstore, then purchased two book, on painting and microbiology. In the clothing store, rather than asking about clothes themselves she asked on how are they made.

And once the evening came, Takeru and Kiseki got on the Ferris wheel.

Staring upwards at the Ferris wheel, Ouka and others waited for the two to return.

We have to make sure to make time for those siblings to be together alone.

While drinking coffee, Ouka listened to voices coming from the intercom. According to EXE's regular reports there was no abnormalities so far.

There weren't many members who knew circumstances surrounding Kiseki. Majority of Inquisitors involved with Kiseki during Ootori Sougetsu's command were killed by Hyakki Yakou with exceptions of Hayato, and Magnolia's team.

A mixed force consisting of elites from each troop was monitoring Kiseki now, their career was carefully investigated and they were selected after an interview.

《"Banshee here, there are no abnormalities around Ferris wheel."》

《"Maintenance team here, checking the Ferris wheel's power supply just in case."》

《"Headquarters, understood."》

".....Mineshiro here, understood."

After listening to the report, Ouka grimaced and glanced at a male member of the maintenance team approaching the Ferris wheel's management building.

While she spend the day together with Kiseki, Ouka conducted her own audit of the mixed troop at the same time. To prevent the information from leaking to the outside, the mixed troop has been under thorough control. So far, it hasn't been leaked to the public that Hyakki Yakou is a girl. It could be said that the possibility of Kiseki being targeted by people from the outside was extremely low.

However, it was different when it came to the insiders. Ouka felt disturbing movements within the unit during the day. It wasn't just a possibility but a fact as she has seen few suspicious actions. Hayato must have noticed them as well, but Ouka was told not to do anything.

Until now, generally no one other than the former 35th platoon's members could get in contact with Kiseki.

It was the first time she has appeared in front of the troops.

In other words, if there is an uncertain element within the Inquisition, it could only move today.

It was just as she predicted. The maintenance team's member who said he will check the power supply had stopped moving near the pillar of the Ferris wheel. He took out something from his vest's pouch, it was a white and square object.

A plastic explosive.

...How foolish.

Ouka made a calm judgment. It was no use thinking of why was the Inquisitor targeting either Kiseki or Takeru. Members had their history checked and those who had a member of their family killed by Hyakki Yakou were immediately rejected. Their relations were supposed to have been strictly investigated. All

members of the mixed troop were loners.

Whether it was some distorted justice, or he was an advocate of destruction... in any case, there was no choice but to stop him.

However, if she reported it on the radio this outing would be cancelled and it was unknown whether another would be allowed.

If possible she would like to avoid that, but if Ouka herself moved it would have been found out by other members or Hayato.

Ouka considered that one of possible developments.

Therefore, there was a need for someone else, someone whose existence was unknown to anyone, to deal with this situation.

She closed her eyes and concentrated her consciousness.

Through Vlad she woke up the vampire factor existing inside her body.

《"...There's work for you. Show yourself so that no one else notices."》

The moment she called out in her brain, silently like a ghost, a shadow appeared beside Ouka.

《"— —Present. Your orders, my master."》

The person who responded briefly was a woman. Her face couldn't be seen, but blonde hair tinged with red have indicated her sex.

Her appearance wasn't visible to people surrounding them. Probably even Mari who has understanding of magic was unable to notice of her existence unless she concentrated to the limit.

Still glaring at the man from the maintenance team, Ouka gave an order.

《"Move that man and restrain him in a place away from here. Can you do that?"》

《"Yes, master."》

《"Do not let yourself be killed and do not kill anyone. Save. That is yours and mine atonement."》

《"As you will."》

Right after the reply, the moment Ouka found the woman gone, she had momentarily moved behind the man.

The man did not notice. He attached the plastic explosive with casual movements, and the moment he tried to pierce the fuse in— —the woman touched his neck.

At once the man had lost his expressions, turned expressionless and stood upright.

When the woman spoke into his ear, the man moved away from the Ferris wheel like a doll and disappeared into the crowd.

《"I will move to my dwelling now. For how long do I isolate this person?"》

《"Until the midnight. Do not release the restraint until I arrive."》

《"Your will."》

After thinking for a little, Ouka opened her eyes slightly.

《".....*Mimulus*."》

Ouka spoke her name as if to restrain her on spot. It was the first time ever since she was bound with a contract with the woman. The woman's name was Mimulus Wallenstein. In the past, she was a mass murderer called Laugh Maker and was the one who murdered Ouka's family.

Mimulus had her blood sucked by vampire-turned Ouka and by being attained vampire blood, she became a vampire apostle. That was the greatest revenge Ouka has accomplished against Mimulus, who wished for her own death.

The reason she followed Ouka, was for her own atonement.

《".....Yes."》

After a moment of bewilderment, Mimulus replied. While perplexed herself, Ouka relay what she had to relay to her.

《"...It seems your little brother is coming to old Japan tomorrow."》

《"....."》

《"Go meet him."》

Mimulus remained silent for a moment, after which she quietly responded.

《".....I will not. I do not have the right to."》

《"Why."》

《"I have decided to give the eternal life I have received from you, for the sake of atonement. Also for your sake, who has given me this opportunity... as well as penance for the many lives I have taken away, the horrible tragedies I have caused I am not forgiven to do anything but to save lives——"》

《"I did not order this to save you. I'm telling you to save your little brother."》

Ouka said to make it clear. It wasn't a lie. Even after exacting her revenge, Ouka did not forgive Mimulus.

Her revenge was over. She could forgive her. She could satisfy herself with that.

However, Mimulus did not wish for that and Ouka herself, thought it would be a mistake. To Mimulus, forgiveness meant death.

That's why Ouka decided to take the path of saving people together with her. Rather than having her just keep living in solitude, making her continue to save people as atonement, was Ouka's responsibility as the one who took revenge. At the same time it was an atonement for Ouka as well. She took many lives of various villains and still had to atone for the sin of taking revenge.

As the executor of revenge and her enemy, the true ancestor and her apostle, they did not cooperate in striving for atonement. Instead, they walked the path of atonement as the light and the shadow, opposites of one another.

《"I will not watch you tomorrow."》

《"....."》

《"Talk with your little brother with just the two of you. Tell Sage everything. He's... been always worried about you, I don't know his feelings though. Confirm them yourself."》

《"....."》

《"...That would be all, go."》

As if push her back, Ouka one-sidedly ended the conversation.

It wasn't like she was being mindful of Mimulus. Ouka had no obligation towards her enemy's little brother either. She did not care how did Mimulus take this decision.

《"...I am grateful to you... Ouka-sama..."》

Although she was told thanks, Ouka had no intention of accepting them.

She did not want to be thanked by the enemy against whom she accomplished her revenge. Being thanked by someone who received a worse punishment than death was wrong.

Ouka breathed in deeply and the moment she was about to confirm the situation through the intercom, 《"Mineshiro, was that you?"》

Hayato's voice sounded in her ear, making her shudder.

It was a confidential channel. In the shadow of the Ferris wheel's post she saw Hayato with Caligula in his hand.

《"...Have you seen her?"》

《"Who do you think I am?"》

That was a very persuasive answer to her question.

《"So you have noticed the disturbing elements within Inquisition as well, vice-chairman Kurogane. Can it be that this was done with an intention of hushing them out right from the start...?"》

《"There is that, too. But it's also true that Kusanagi Kiseki needed *a change of pace*."》

《"...So two birds with one stone, is it."》

As usual, he was incredibly careful and incredibly stubborn. Ouka was grateful from her heart that Hayato was their ally.

When Ouka sipped some coffee while smiling wryly, Hayato flipped his coat as he turned around on his heel.

And a moment before he disappeared in the crowd he spoke again.

《"Those clothes, they look good on you."》

"Gpffht...!"

She spouted coffee through both her mouth and nose, then hurriedly she put a handkerchief against her mouth. Why did he always come up with these surprises. It didn't seem like he tried to joke, more like he was an airhead.

While sniffing, Ouka fixed her appearance, then once again looked up at the Ferris wheel.

"Nfu-fufu..."

Before anyone realized, Mari was smiling from ear to ear.

Ikaruga looked suspiciously from the side.

"What is it? You're being creepy."

"Y'know~, it's been a while since all of us went out to play together so I thought it feels like we're back to being students~. And we've got Kiseki-chan as a new member, right? It's kind of moving, right."

Usagi was reminded of the horrible war and had narrowed her eyes in thought.

"After Kusanagi and Nikaido went to Magic Academy, we have continued a series of battles. Back then I did not think that a day like this would come."

"We did our best, didn't we. I'm sure this is our reward."

It was really too trivial to be called a reward, but it could be said from their hearts that it was worth it.

Even these days, they've been sometimes wondering if this life is a dream.

"Speaking of which... back then, it was also a cold winter like we have now."

Ikaruga's exhaled white breath and looked up at the Ferris wheel.

Right after the war had ended, whenever she woke up in the morning in her own room she saw a bloodied. frozen battlefield instead her own room and has become afraid of opening her eyes. The days devoid of reality have continued for some time. She was finally able to realize this was reality thanks to the fact they were able to come in contact with Kiseki.

After a year had passed since the war, they were allowed to meet Kiseki and Takeru.

The academy wasn't reconstructed yet back then, so Kiseki and Takeru were temporarily evacuated to Magic Academy. Ouka and the others remained living in the old Japan and helped out with the reconstruction as they waited for the two to return.

A year later, when the situation had started showing signs of calming down the two had finally come back.

Even now they remember that time. Everyone embraced each other while crying and couldn't move for several hours. Kiseki repeated thanks and apologies towards everyone.

And today, it felt like... one more burden was lifted from her shoulders.

"Just like this... I guess that from now on, we'll retrieve these things one by one."

Listening to Ouka's voice the three smiled.

It was hard to say that the world's wounds have been healed. Even though the problems were solved, new ones emerge. However, it wasn't hopeless as it used to be. Comrades who have overcome that catastrophic situation, had always hope by their side.

They only had to enjoy the happiness. Everything was restored to an extent that allowed that.

One person aside.

"....."

Ever since the war has ended, they hardly touched Lapis' subject. It wasn't like they forgot. As long as he, who was closest to her, did not say anything, his comrades would not ask.

Takeru didn't say much of what happened to Lapis afterwards. They didn't ask him clearly to explain what did he intend to do during the last battle with Ootori Sougetsu either. Kurogane Hayato and Hoshijiro Nagaru probably knew the details, but there was no point in asking.

They knew Takeru was shouldering something when he came back. However, even without words his comrades understood that was something no one else could shoulder.

Lapis was the only one who did not come back. She alone, was lost in that battle.

All Takeru said was "she is always by our side".

What did those words mean? Was it a sentimental way of saying "dead"?

Ouka did not think so.

Her attention was attracted by Takeru and Kiseki inside Ferris wheel's gondola.

Will he one day tell them about it? About what happened on that day.

Ouka couldn't get herself to think that Lapis had died. She has a feeling that it's just as Takeru says, like she's still around... like she would come back to them one day. It was possible that Takeru is waiting for that.

She couldn't help but to think so.

* * *

Inside the ascending gondola, Takeru and Kiseki stared at the city's landscape. Looking at the city from above like this, made them realize that even after five years have passed – the buildings under constructions were still conspicuous.

Five years earlier, almost everything in this area was razed to the ground. There was nothing but ashes and rubble. For the sake of reconstruction the ground was solidified and materials were collected from other prefectures and countries finally allowing this place to return back to normal. Still, the number of skyscrapers has decreased as compared to before, the Ferris wheel they were riding on now was also smaller than previous one.

"How is it? The Ferris wheel."

Takeru asked Kiseki who had looked outside with a hand on the window. She stopped peeking outside and smiled towards him.

"It's amazing. It's just as Onii-chan says, you can see really far away."

He pointed outside the window.

"Far away in that direction, there is the sea. And over there, where's few lights, see? There is the border, Mari's homeland. Next, over there faaa—aar away behind the mountains, is our home village."

"Hee... it feels like we turned into birdies."

Hearing a childish way of phrasing it, Takeru laughed quietly.

"From now on, once in a month you'll be able to go outside like this. You probably have other places you want to go, right? Like mountains, or the sea. Although it's impossible to stay over, it's okay as long as it's a day trip."

When Takeru said that, Kiseki once again looked outside the window.

Staring into the distance, she looked at the landscape as the day ended.

Compared to before, the number of lights in the capital has decreased. By looking from above, one could easily notice the difference. On a first glance one might think that the reconstruction was already over, but there were many vacant lots in the outskirts. There were still many people living in temporary housing.

"So Kiseki has... destroyed the entirety of such pretty city."

Kiseki muttered so while squinting. Takeru fell silent and only listened to her voice.

They already spoke about this many times. Hyakki Yakou has fulfilled Kiseki's wishes, everything Hyakki Yakou did was what Kiseki had wanted. That was why it was all Kiseki's fault. She said she is willing to receive any punishment.

That's why Takeru responded like this. Even if Hyakki Yakou fulfilled Kiseki's desires, there was someone else who made her wish for destruction. All these sins belonged to those who made her so, and there was no need for her to shoulder everything.

This conversation did always go in circles. They have also had little quarrels over it. Whenever that happened, Kiseki always had a horrible nightmare. That's why Takeru intentionally avoided this conversation.

"...Kiseki is very happy. She can be with Onii-chan every day and everyone from

35th platoon comes to meet her."

"....."

"There is no pain nor suffering. Kiseki didn't think a day like this would come."

Joining her fingers on top of her lap, she stared into the distance.

"The day before yesterday Onii-chan asked if Kiseki is happy."

"...Yeah."

"Kiseki's answer wasn't a lie. Kiseki is really happy from the bottom of her heart. Unlike in the past, now she thinks she wants to live. Everyone... this world... Kiseki honestly wants it to be by her side."

"....."

"However, any more than that... she thinks is a luxury."

It was the same thing Takeru had told Ouka.

Too luxurious for sinners to wish for. Any more happiness than this would be too convenient.

Takeru himself thought so too. While listening to Kiseki's voice, he touched his own neck with his fingertips. There was a sensation of cold metal. It was a special explosive Gleipnir. It was a collar that automatically exploded when Hyakki Yakou did harm to any people.

Just like Kiseki considered imprisonment her punishment, Takeru thought this collar to be his own punishment. A responsibility he has to take for choosing to keep Kiseki alive... the punishment for driving Kiseki into a corner with his choice, that is what Takeru risked his life for.

That was why he told himself many times that he shouldn't wish for any more than he has now. He believed that the current situation was the best, even that he was blessed with the situation as it was.

However, whenever he tried to make himself believe so, a voice sounded in his head.

Voice of hers, wishing him to become happy.

"...No one will blame you for being happy."

When Takeru said that, Kiseki shook her head.

"It's not no one. Probably Kiseki herself thinks any more than this is no good. She thinks... she has become adult to an extent she can think so."

If she didn't think so herself, Hyakki Yakou would have used power in order to bring her outside.

Kiseki put a hand on her chest and said.

"Of course Kiseki also wants to go outside. There are many places she wants to go to. However, she is plenty happy as is."

"....."

"That's why, Onii-chan. There is no need to work so hard any more, okay? Kiseki is really happy now."

The smile Kiseki had made in this moment, was a vigorous and honest one.

".....I see."

Takeru lowered his sight onto the sword placed on his knee.

There was no doubt he could proudly say that he was living happy days as he looked back towards the last five years. Looking from Takeru and the others' perspective who have thrown themselves into a hopeless battle, the last five years were like a miracle. Even though many were lost, those days were just as valuable.

However, it was about time——to take a step forward.

Takeru clenched the sword from over the sword bag and raised his face.

"Sorry. But I——am not satisfied with this."

"...Onii-chan."

"Even if you are, I can't be happy with this."

Looking straight at Kiseki, Takeru declared this clearly.

It's not for your sake. It's for my own, that is.

"Somewhere in the corner of our hearts, both you and me, live in fear. Fearing that this happiness is brittle like a piece of glasswork... if something happens, it'll

be immediately broken, that is."

He lifted up the sword and put the tip of the sheath on the floor.

"I don't deny the consciousness of sin that you feel. It's something both you and I need to shoulder. We won't be able to get rid of it, ever."

"....."

"But don't tell me not to do my best. I will continue wishing for you to be able to walk outside normally, and live normally like a normal human. I will make it so that you won't have to be scared of your own power. I'll do anything for that sake."

Hearing Takeru's words, Kiseki's eyes shook slightly.

Takeru's eyes did not change in the least from how they were five years earlier. Kiseki had once again realized that her brother's selfishness was far above her own.

That's the kind of man he was. Because of the peaceful days, she forgot that.

He wouldn't listen no matter what he was told.

Smiling wryly, Kiseki scratched her cheek.

"...You don't change, Onii-chan."

"Yeah. Humans don't change so easily. Also, well... above all."

Takeru shrugged and spoke with a serious expression.

"——I don't want to stay virgin for life, definitely not."

"Fuah! ...Khh... t-that? It's not the collar that bothered Onii-chan, but that?"

It wasn't a laughing matter, but Kiseki suppressed her mouth with her hand. You honest man, is what Kiseki felt like retorting with. Takeru furrowed his eyebrows as if to say he's serious.

"You're laughing, but it's the same for you, y'know? You can't make kids either, right?"

"Mm... no, I guess Kiseki didn't think about those kinds of things."

"Liar. Several times I've heard "I want Onii-chan's baby" come up in your sleep-

talk."

Kiseki froze.

"...No way?"

"I'm serious. How about you think of what I feel as I sleep next to you. What kind of face do I make as your brother?"

She faced away and covered it with her both hands in embarrassment. She was red up to her ears. Takeru laughed seeing that embarrassment.

"What's the point of turning all red now? I know the best of all that you're a pervert."

"Kiseki isn't a p-p-pervert! It can't be helped, it's love!"

"Why blush? Usually you say "the fact Onii-chan is onii-chan matters not as long as there's love" like it's nothing."

Kiseki shook her head to the sides.

"This and that are different things～... it was sleep-talk..."

"Well, I already gave up as well. I made things so clear, but you don't see me as your brother but... no, that's a little wrong. More like it's *because* I'm your brother——"

She stood up while shaking her both hands.

"There is no need to say it! Rather, Kiseki knows everything, too! Among Onii-chan's perverted books there are little sister o——"

Takeru stood up with a strong momentum.

"——I-impossible! I left it on top of the air conditioner, where your hands cannot reach, so why do you know that?!"

"Moreover, it's one where the man has a girlfriend but lays his hands on little sister! What, are you expecting Kiseki to settle down in such position?! You're such a horrible onii-chan!"

"Arghh, even if I'm your brother, seeing we sleep clinging together every night these things pass through my head! It can't be helped that I'm in anguish!"

"So, so? Onii-chan is a pervert as well! Might as well go for it instead of enduring! It's not manly!"

"Heck, it's manly if anything! I have turned my heart into that of a demon to protect many things, not just decency!"

In very novel atmosphere they were supposed to have novel talk, but it ended up turning into common quarrel. The two who used to feel so awkward have become close enough to be able to have a normal (?!) sibling fight.

By the way, at the time on the ground——

"...Hey, isn't their gondola shaking lots?"

"It is creaking quite a lot, does it not... was Kiseki-san afraid of heights?"

"These things happen... an overly excited bakaouple ending up doing those acts."

"——Banshee team, hear me?! What's happening inside there?!"

《"We can't see from this angle! Hey, maintenance group, what's up with surveillance cameras?!"》

《"No way, they were moving just a moment ago! Is this also Hyakki Yakou's power...?!"》

《"Kurogane here. Raise the speed. Drag them down before they make a kid."》

——The swaying gondola made the 35th platoon and EXE move about in confusion.

Unaware of the panic in their surroundings, Takeru and Kiseki continued their silly quarrel.

After arguing for a while they noticed gondola's raised speed and have sat down in their seats again.

In the middle of the awkward atmosphere they both faced to the side.

I'm already twenty-one, what am I doing... it's not like I'm a high school student. Takeru felt like holding his head in his arms, but he did say what he wanted. Not everything was for Kiseki's sake. It was for himself, for Kiseki, for his comrades, for the world. This was the conclusion he had ended up with after

including all these.

— —To continue fighting.

The long break had ended. It was about time to start running again. Kusanagi Takeru wasn't the one to be content with the current situation.

They were nearly on the ground. The first date after five years and the ride on Ferris wheel they couldn't get on last time, was about to end with a silly conversation.

"Hey... Onii-chan."

Kiseki looked up at him from below. He turned towards her, wondering what is it.

"...Did you not choose anyone even after five years because you can't have a child?"

Maybe because they were siblings, it was a straightforward question. Takeru closed his eyes and responded seriously, rather than joke.

"There's that too, I don't want my child to have to shoulder the demon curse."

"...Which means that isn't all. Kiseki is... fine with it. She has properly accepted Onii-chan's feelings back then."

"....."

"But everyone's waiting, aren't they? For Onii-chan's answer."

Takeru squinted and clenched the sword lying on the floor. Kiseki too, has turned her sight towards the sword he held.

"...I know. I already have the answer inside me... but."

"You still can't recover?"

".....Yep."

He smiled weakly.

"Five years have already passed, but it feels like it's getting worse. I might be beautifying it, but it's harsh like an unrequited love. Good grief, doesn't feel manly at all."

His expression with a bitter smile didn't feel as ambitious as usual, he couldn't hide feelings for someone who was far away. Kiseki understood Takeru's feelings very well. She was dumped the same way. She still dragged it on and didn't completely give up.

The difference between the two was, that the one Takeru thought of was no longer by his side.

"But."

However, even as he stared into the distance, he looked towards his waiting comrades.

"If I don't settle this, my partner and everyone else too will get angry. "Who do you think you are～" that is."

Holding the sword Takeru stood up.

"So I intend to give a proper answer."

"...I see. So it's already decided?"

Kiseki smiled thinly as she asked, to which Takeru nodded in response.

And tightening his expression, he extended his hand towards Kiseki.

"——Once everything is over, I'll properly make her happy."

Making a slightly lonesome expression, she took Takeru's hand and stood up.

His comrades were already waiting by the boarding gate, leaning on the fence. Although he had no idea why were they so desperate, but Kiseki put a finger against her lips as she looked down on them.

"By the way, who is it?"

"Hey heey, I said once it's over, right."

"To say ahead, no saying "everyone" okay?"

"....."

"O – nii – chan ?"

"Just joking. I told you, I already decided."

"Reaaally～? Judging from pervy books' tendencies..."

"Don't judge me based on porn. Kusanagi doesn't goes back on their word."



Seeing from the side as her brother goes "hmp" and puffs up his chest, Kiseki laughed. She had once abandoned herself to forbidden love, but now she understood well that it came from her ignorance.

However, it was certain it was not a lie. It wasn't fake. After all, even now that feeling remained inside her.

Kiseki loved Kusanagi Takeru. Both as a brother, and as a man.

However, the one who can make him happy as a man is definitely someone else other than her. Therefore, Kiseki had decided to make him happy as his little sister.

From the bottom of her heart she felt okay with it.

—So, who on earth will her older brother choose?

Kiseki had ended her first date with her brother while looking forward to that.

* * *

Eleven in the morning next day. Kusanagi Takeru came to the isolated prison inside Kanto region's sanctuary.

He walked soundly inside an underpass dug a few hundred meters below the Critical Point.

The reason he has arrived in this place, was because of new information on the demon curse he received from Sage.

European Shelter's investigation team had found a hideout of a German magical association from before the war and as a result of its exploration, they found a document.

During the dictatorship of German's extreme right wing, they seem to have been repeated magical experiments countless times. Among the experiment data, there was something related to "curses".

The attempt to turn a magical organism-related curse into a weapon has ended up in a failure, but among the data a word "Curse Releaser" has been found.

In general there were many witches who used curse magic, but the curses used by witches and those used by magical organisms could be said to be completely different things.

According to Ikaruga's investigation, the demon curse was something similar to Suginami Suzaku's genetic existence. In order to inherit something from parent to children, scientifically it would require genetic manipulation. But that was as far as Ikaruga was able to verify. They had no idea how to release a magic curse enchanted into genes.

However, the Curse Releaser who was supposedly a descendant of onmyouji was described in German documents, was said to have discovered the method to do that over a hundred and fifty years ago.

This data has been discarded and no more details have been added.

However—among the data there was a shadow of a certain man. He participated in experiments involving creating a weapon out of magical organism curse, and at the same time has helped with Myth Summoning for the sake of releasing curses.

Although his name was not written down, Takeru knew that man better than he would like to.

After surpassing several bulkheads he stepped inside the deepest part of the prison.

It was similar to the place Kiseki was once held in, dim and cold.

A single chair in the center was illuminated by light.

"....."

Takeru approached the chair and sat down.

He breathed out and at the same time he raised his face, the place in front of him lit up strongly.

Below that light, sleeping, was a man in various restraints and chains.

".....It's been around five years, huh? You look healthy."

When Takeru spoke, the man opened his eyes a little and raised his head.

He had golden hair and a smiling face that made people feel a chill... There was no way Takeru would have forgotten those eyes, which even after tasting an endless pain, did not lose the light from the past.

"Ohh, it's been five years already? It felt like an instant to me."

"....."

"However, it was an instant beyond everything in my life. Right now, I can understand Kiseki-san's feelings very well... this is a quite tasteful despair."

"....."

"So? What do you need today, Kusanagi Takeru? Did you miss me?"

Takeru did not answer. He just——continued to sit quietly as he stared at the man, at Haunted.

Haunted too, glared at him as his lips formed a smile.

Nothing has changed ever since that battle.

Takeru did not kill Haunted.

No, *he couldn't bring himself to kill Haunted*. At the very last moment he interrupted the use of the Secret Art and when he released it in order to return back to where he belonged, his attack had evaded Haunted's vitals.

It was all because he thought Haunted could still be used. The information a man who lived for hundreds, even thousands of years, was extremely valuable. He could have information necessary for releasing Kusanagis' curse.

Putting his murderous intent and the gain on scales, Takeru chose the gain.

In the end, that thinking could be said to be correct.

"I'll make this short. Spit whatever you know about Curse Releaser."

"Hmm. Did you grow taller? You look even more like Orochi now. By the way, is Mari-san healthy? Did her boobies grow?"

"Nope."

"Is that so, I'm relieved! That's how it has to be, it's my Mari-san after all! She mustn't grow big boobs by any chance!"

"Answer me."

He had no intention of continuing the silly talk. No matter how much he was provoked, Takeru would not answer. In the past years he had grown mentally quite a bit.

Takeru had no intention of turning his anger towards this man. He felt no emotions welling up. Haunted pursed his lips.

"You've turned into a boring adult, didn't you... this much is fine, isn't it, just some silly talk."

"I know that you've been in a German laboratory before the war. Tell me about the Curse Releaser."

Twisting while completely bound by restraints, Haunted shook his head.

From behind his bangs, he directed a cold stare towards Takeru.

"I'll tell you, but give me a compensation."

Honestly, it was an unexpected answer. Takeru thought that extracting information from him would be complicated. He didn't think this man would simply speak as part of an exchange.

"...What do you want? You're not getting Mari."

"I will get Mari-san. I don't need her given to me."

"Then what is it? Dáinsleif?"

"Is Nacht doing well?"

"Ever since that battle she hasn't spoke even once. That thing won't answer anyone but you."

"Nn-hmm, well, that's not it either. Although as a result, there will be a need of releasing Nacht anyway."

——At that point, Takeru realized what did Haunted want.

"What I request is not an thing nor a person. You know already, Kusanagi Takeru... what I seek is despair."

"....."

"I will tell you information about the Curse Releaser and his whereabouts. Should be still alive. I will also tell you the way to save Kiseki-san, if necessary I will even lend you my power for that."

"If your information is a lie, if you betray me, I will break Dáinsleif."

Although Takeru didn't know how important Nacht was to Haunted, at the very least there was no doubt that she was an equivalent of what Lapis was to him.

He knew that much about his archenemy. This threat should be effective.

"That is fine. I will definitely not betray you. I don't care aaaaaaaaas long you give me what I want."

Haunted pulled the chain to the limit and leaned forward, stretching crackling his neck towards Takeru.

Narrowing his right eye while opening his left wide, he looked directly at Takeru.

"——A rematch. Give me a continuation of that battle."

"....."

"I found a place to die. I was defeated and was supposed to die there, corrupted, frustrated and full of regret. You betrayed that and made me despair. It wasn't pleasant despair, it was nauseatingly sweet despair that you dropped me into. You really are quite a man, you make me feel sick from the bottom of my heart."

"....."

"By humiliating you, who has kept me alive like this I will be able to go out into the world in order to bloom the flowers of despair. That is all I wish for."

His glaring eyes were seeking battle.

That battle, one more time.

Crossing his arms in front of himself, Takeru closed his eyes. The memory of that battle was revived.

Takeru raised his jaw, fangs peeked out from the edges of his mouth and he

opened his eyes faintly.

His red demon eyes looked down at Haunted as they drew a twisted arc.

—Fine, you loser. One more time.

That was Kusanagi Takeru's,

The 35th Test Platoon's signal for the start of a new battle.

* * *

When he opened the door of the isolated prison, everyone was gathered outside.

Mineshiro Ouka, Nikaido Mari, Saionji Usagi, Suginami Ikaruga.

All members of the former 35th test platoon were standing there, there was a helicopter with a rotating propeller behind them.

"Is our destination decided?"

Hearing Mari ask, Takeru responded.

"The South Pole. There's a Nazi remnants' shelter, it appears they are continuing experimenting on curses."

"Quite an old name appeared there. Did that bunch really hide in Antarctica for last hundred and fifty years?"

Beside Ouka who was thinking about that, stood Ikaruga who had held down her hair as she played with her white coat.

"Sounds possible. Nazis were deeply involved with the Inquisition until around the middle of the war, above all, they were the main factor in making Alchemist that big. I don't think they would just eat dirt without doing anything."

Placing a finger on her chin, Usagi squinted.

"Does that not mean that it is possible that last "Designs Children" who hadn't Phoenix removed out of them is also there? That would be two birds with one stone."

Nodding in response to Usagi's words, Takeru approached them.

"That's how it is. Suginami Suzaku's fate, Hyakki Yakou's curse, we have a possibility of putting everything to an end."

Putting his hand on the handle of the sword by his waist, Takeru turned his gaze towards everyone.

They all turned a resolved smile towards him.

"Okay. Now that's decided, let's make it quick! Go there, crush them and kidnap the Curse Releaser!"

As she covered her eyes with her cap, Mari's muffler waved in the wind.

"Considering it's South Pole, we will need a transport machine that flies on ultra-high altitude. Our current time limit for acting within the Sanctuary is two hours. That will be enough as long as we know the location. Let's do it, Takeru... I will talk with vice-chairman Kurogane."

Ouka nodded strongly as she held her hair down.

"Good grief, Valhalla, Alchemist, Inquisition and God... now it's Nazi remnants? Isn't this a little too heavy for Small Fry Platoon?"

Hearing Ikaruga's mutter, Usagi snorted and pulled her sniper rifle's bolt.

"Not like it has started now. It is not impossible for us to do."

Taking all of their wills into account, Takeru smiled lightly.

There was no need to say "come with me". These girls would follow him by force if necessary. It hasn't changed since the past.

They were comrades. No matter how much time has passed, *here* was the place he belonged to and could not separate himself from it.

Being here and being able to start running together with his comrades again made Takeru more happy than anything.

Clenching his sword, he faced forward.

"Reformation after three years, huh. We've aged, didn't we."

"At least say we've "become adults" instead!"

"That's right, Takeru! We're still twenty-one! Bursting with youth, cute and spongy!"

"The way you say that make you sound like a granny."

"If we talk like this while still twenty-one, captain Oonogi will beat us up. We still have a lot of time."

Together with everyone, Takeru walked in front heading towards the helicopter.

The headwind was intensive enough to push them back, but they did not stop.

However, just like Usagi said, it wasn't like that started now. They had a long rest. They were in top form to fight.

His comrades and his partner were here.

"By the way, what are we again? What kind of team are we?"

"35th... mixed troop? Doesn't sound too good though..."

"How about 35-ves unmarried platoon?"

"It's twenty-one, right?! Please stop mentioning age... there is no need to change the name for no reason."

"Right."

Smiling bitterly, Takeru stiffened his expression like usual.

"Well, let's go, you guys ready?"

"——Any time. Your orders, *captain*."

It sounded nostalgic. In the past, Takeru was a captain.

And now too, he was their captain without change.

EXE, Regin, a teacher. They walked on their respective paths, but these five... six people's paths continued to overlap. They continued to remain the place they belonged to for each other.

They continued to fight. Until everything is saved.

For that sake, Takeru pulled out the sword and pointed the blade at the destination——

"35th Test Platoon——Commence Mission!"

——And as usual he slashed as a start of new battle.

More After...

— — When he opened his eyes, he saw azure color.

An azure-colored field spreading everywhere.

The twilight sky with various colors mixed together in it was not cracked nor collapsing.

It was just a beautiful scenery, extending into the distance.

When he breathed in, he felt a sweet scent. And a soft and warm sensation on his head.

He raised his head as if turning over in sleep.

There, stood a girl with a gentle expression.

Like a mother, like a goddess, she looked soft and sacred.

Looking up at her, the young man reached out towards her cheek.

The girl appeared to immerse dearly in the sensation of the hand touching her cheek as she looked down at him.

"...It has been a while, Host."

".....I knew that you were always by my side."

Hearing Takeru's words, Lapis smiled broadly.

Takeru too, made a light smile.

"...Did I die?"

"No. You have kissed the newborn children you had with your wife and headed to sleep. Please rest assured. When the morning comes, you will return to happy days."

".....I see."

Making a relieved, and at the same time slightly lonely expression, Takeru looked at Lapis.

"Why did you come to meet me?"

"I do not know. The only thing I did in the world as the God, was restoring your body back to normal. That is why me being inside your dream can only be said to be a miracle."

"....."

"If anything... it might be because you have accomplished your goal. With that, mine and your connection must have been restored."

Although she didn't know, thinking that way would make her happy, is what Lapis said.

Takeru stroked Lapis' cheek time after time again.

"Did I... fulfill my promise?"

"Yes."

"I saved everything, right?"

"Yes."

"...I see."

He closed his eyes as if relieved. This time, Lapis pat his head.

"...Was it unexpected whom I choose?"

"No, not even a little? It was very much like you, Host."

"It was quite difficult, y'know? There was actually a huge quarrel about that."

Takeru spoke excitedly, happy to chat with her.

They talked about various things. He conveyed many happy memories to her.

But for some reason he felt very sleepy, although he wanted to talk lots, he felt comfortable with his head stroked and dozed off.

"Hey... Lapis, I have much more I want to talk about..."

"I am always by your side."

I know that. I always felt it. Even though he held a sword devoid of warmth, he noticed that she was by his side. Even though he couldn't see her, he felt her existence.

However, he couldn't help but wish for time where he could touch her like this.

"...We'll meet again, right?"

"Yes... definitely. From now on, we can meet any time in your sleep."

Hearing that, relieved from the bottom of his heart, Takeru breathed out deeply. He stopped resisting sleep and entrusted himself to the calm.

Wind blew.

Petals danced in the air soundly,

"...Host, do you remember the contract with me?"

A gentle voice had made his eardrums tremble.

Yeah, of course. I remember.

Takeru responded inside his heart.

There was no way he would forget.

His answer to those questions haven't at all changed since then.

—— Question one. Do you have an intention of becoming an inquisitor? ——
—— Question two. Do you have an intention of exterminating witches? ——
—— Question three. Will you discard yourself for the sake of your goal? ——
—— Question four. Will you discard what you hold dear for the sake of your goal? —— —— And,

"This is the last question."

——The last question was,

"Host... are you now happy?"

Opening his heavy eyelids in the end, Takeru looked at Lapis' smiling face under the twilight sky.

There was no need for tears. After all, this wasn't a parting.

Days full of happiness would continue from here on.

That's why Takeru enjoyed this moment as he answered.

"Yeah... thanks to you being with me, I am very, very happy."

There was a beautiful smile in front of him.

Petals danced in the sky, gentle wind blew around them.

The sensation of his head being pat invited sleep.

He fell asleep inside his dream.

Takeru who had finished all his battles, once again returned into his happy life.

"I too am... very happy thanks to being with you, Host."

Embraced by this azure warmth, he fell into tranquility— —



